THE FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST IN WILMINGTON.

CHARGE TO THE PEOPLE,

AT THE

Installation of the Rev. Elijah Harmon

DELIVERED BY THE

REV. DANIEL P. NOYES.

TOGETHER WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF A COUNCIL OF DISMISSION AND INSTALLATION, HELD AT WILMINGTON, DECEMBER 15, 1885.

PUBLISHED BY DIRECTION OF THE CHURCH COMMITTEE.

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JOSEPH W. HAMILTON, Printer, 221 Washington Street.

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THE COUNCIL.

Rev. Daniel P. Noyes, installed Oct. 11, 1877, as pastor of the First Church of Christ, in Wilmington, was formally dismissed from his pastorate by an Ecclesiastical Council, held Dec. 15, 1885, and at the same time Rev. Elijah Harmon, of Winchester, N. H., was installed as his successor.

Of this council, Rev. Daniel March, D. D., of Woburn, was Moderator, and Rev. Frank S. Adams, of Reading, Scribe. Prayer was offered by the Moderator; after which the business of the council was taken up.

The Pastor's letter of resignation was read, from which the following brief extract is made:

"I came among you, with faith in the Divine Providence, and with faith, also, in this church and people, and with the purpose to do what I could, to see you in a condition to settle a pastor with good prospects for him and for you. I hope you are in that condition now. I expect to testify to any person whom you may agree upon and ask to be your pastor, that I have found you a good people,—faithful, kind, patient and reasonable; a good people to live among; worthy of honor and love.

I have had, through the whole of my seven years and a half, a happy pastorate. It has been a season of uninterrupted happiness; for

which my heart thanks God. I have not, indeed, had every wish gratified. Persons, both of the elder and of the younger portions of the congregation, for whom I had cherished distinct and earnest hopes, have not yet realized those hopes. Perhaps the All-Seeing Eye recognizes some of them already in the number of Christ's true followers. Perhaps all eyes are soon to see them all, plainly there.

My heart yearns to pronounce a word of effectual blessing upon every individual who can, in any sense, be counted among those who belong with this people, or under this church's care. May God's mighty love dwell in you all. So prays your pastor,

DANIEL P. NOYES."

The records, showing the action of the church and society upon this communication, were presented; from which it appeared that the church, having taken the matter into consideration for one week, in accepting the pastor's resignation, unanimously adopted the following as the sentiment of the church:

"For the past seven years we have been blessed by a pastorate affording an example of earnest and sincere Christian living, of constant and diligent labor in the service of our Lord, and of wise judgment, fortitude and forbearance under many difficulties. The first impulse inclines us strongly against the impending separation from our pastor; but he believes it to be in accordance with wisdom and duty, that he should now relinquish the care of this particular church; and he asks us not to interpose objections. As his teachings among us have been characterized by self-denial, we should practice it in this case, by cheer-

fully preferring his wishes to our own, and submitting to what seems to be the will of Divine Providence; thereby to render the highest tribute of our affection and gratitude.

We recognize the valuable assistance the church has received from the members of the pastor's family; and especially, the unremitting zeal with which his wife has striven for the moral, social and Christian advancement of our people. Our best wishes and prayers will go with them; and we hope and believe that their good works will be rewarded in Heaven, where the greater deeds and 'The little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love,' are all recorded."

The records, showing the action of the church and society in calling Rev. Elijah Harmon to the pastorate, and his reply to the call, were also presented. The council voted that the papers and records were satisfactory; that the action of the church and society be ratified, and that it proceed to the installation of the pastor-elect.

The council adopted the following minute as expressing its judgment in relation to the subjects before it:

"In ratifying the action of the church and society in accepting the resignation of their pastor, the Rev. Daniel P. Noyes, the council wish to express their hearty appreciation of the rare wisdom and the loving and paternal spirit which have characterized his ministry here, and which are unmistakably evidenced in the letter of resignation. It is our conviction that under Christ he and his have rendered a signal service to this church and community, and one which is gratefully appreciated by this people. The council takes the greatest pleasure in commending Brother Noyes to the churches of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as a learned and godly man; as an unusually wise and faithful pastor; as an

instructive and convincing preacher; as a minister versatile in the organization of Christian work; and as in all respects worthy the confidence and esteem of any church which may desire his services.

We also wish to express our gratification with the course which the church has pursued in staying up the hands of its pastor, and thus enabling him to bring to perfection that peculiar work which in the providence of God he felt called to do. It is the opinion of the council that the church has thus at length been delivered from the dangers which have so long crippled its usefulness.

We also extend our congratulations to the church upon the auspicious settlement to-day of another pastor, whose past and present experiences are such as to lead us to expect by the favor of the Holy Spirit, a future of large blessing and prosperity to this patient and praying church of Jesus Christ."

The services of installation took place in the following order:

Invocation, by Rev. George L. Gleason, of Byfield.
Reading of Scripture, by Rev. S. Sherburne Matthews, of Boston.
Sermon, by Rev. Joshua W. Wellman, D. D., of Malden.
Installing Prayer, by Rev. Albert H. Plumb, D. D., of Boston.
Charge to the Pastor, by Rev. Winfield S. Hawkes, of South Hadley Falls.
Right Hand of Fellowship, by Rev. Daniel March, D. D., of Woburn.
Charge to the People, by Rev. Daniel P. Noyes, of Byfield.
Concluding Prayer, by Rev. Clark Carter, of Lawrence.
Benediction, by Rev. Elijah Harmon, Pastor.

Music was interspersed in the exercises, including the following

HYMN:

TUNE—"NORMAN."

O Holy Lord, our God,
By heavenly hosts adored,
  Hear us, we pray;
To thee the cherubim,
Angels and seraphim,
Unceasing praises bring—
  Their homage pay.

Here give Thy word success,
And this Thy servant bless,
  His labors own;
And while the sinners Friend
His life and words commend,
Thy Holy Spirit send,
  And make him known.

May every passing year
More happy still appear
  Than this glad day;
With numbers fill the place,
Adorn Thy saints with grace;
Thy truth may all embrace,
  O Lord, we pray.

CHARGE TO THE PEOPLE.

It is certainly a seemly provision of our Apostolic church order, in its services of Installation, that it invites *the people* to a public recognition of duties in the newly-formed relation. And I feel it a grateful courtesy that has given to *me* the privilege of leading you to-day in the express acknowledgment of these sacred and joyful obligations. It fills the mind with a sense of sweetness, to come, as we do this moment, consciously together into the view of these relations. For, in common with all our Congregational churches from the beginning, this church is

simply a church of Jesus Christ for the place where it stands,—and it is nothing else. It unites the people in Christ's family, opens to them "the fellowship of the Father and the Son," flings wide the doors of brotherly sympathy, with all who share that and with all who lack that, makes plain before them the thousand-fold avenues of the service of Christ's kingdom, and lifts them unto the dignity of "kings and priests" in crowning them with the right and authority of rendering the Christian service in orderly ways everywhere.

The duly accredited representatives of the churches, in whose presence Christ's whole church is here, have recognized this, your pastor, and have given him the right hand of fellowship. All churches have owned him. You have received him. *He is yours.* Henceforward he is one with you, and he leads you in those acts of united worship and in those blessed paths of thought and of labor to which Christ calls his beloved.

But you stand in manifold relations. You will not be surprised, my honored and dear friends, to hear from my lips an invitation to remember through every day of this pastorate now so happily begun, *the honor and the interests of the town of Wilmington.* Historically, the town grew out of the church; and was long but its civil and political form. Its true interests are, and will ever be, contained within the interests, and form a part of the duty of this church. The church, and every member of the church, young and old, men and women, should cherish a pride and love for the town, and call down Heaven's benedictions upon it. No word should ever be spoken inconsistent with a due respect, a genuine sympathy and an indestructible fidelity to the best interests of the town, or with the longing and the purpose to make

it, in the highest possible degree, a dear and happy home to every one of its families and every one of its citizens. Depend upon it, you need for the good of this church and for the individual well being of every person in it, this habit of loyalty to the town and to its individual inhabitants.—Christ calls you all "neighbors."

It will be again but a repetition of an exhortation long familiar to you, when I add: That it is a credit to any man, to stand forth openly a member of an *Ecclesiastical Society* which is responsible for the administration of the finances of a Christian church. It is not obvious, on what principle any person can seek to avoid the downright acknowledgment of a duty which is plainly a privilege and an honor, as well as an obligation. No one of our minds, my dear friends, is working precisely in that just and equitable manner, or in harmony with that habit of righteousness that is truly involved in complete and perfect sanity, unless he welcomes such obligations when fairly open to him.

But besides the financial "parish," there is another, which is not always rightly conceived and defined, the *working parish*, of this church. From the beginning almost to the present time, but not quite, the parish of this church covered the township, and included every one of its inhabitants. *Now*, this church is no longer "The Church of Christ in Wilmington," as it originally so truly named itself, but only "the First Church," here. You have welcomed another; to which with hearty Christian love you give the hand of fellowship. In the breaking down of the ancient strictness of territorial parish lines, many persons, it is to be feared, have lost the original sense of responsibility. But the lines are still clear. There is a certain body of families definitely included within the responsibility of this church. To all these

families, it is this church's duty to carry the gospel, if any neglect to seek it. And to these families this church is closely held. For its fidelity to them it is strictly accountable. It is bound to watch over them all, and to counsel and to work for their good. This church is nearer to them than any other. They are not all regular attendants and supporters. But they are the nearest parts of the "all nations" to whom Christ's messengers are sent; they are "neighbors" to these living successors of the church members of the apostolic days—to *you* who constitute the church that is in this place. Look after this parish, under your new pastor's lead, dear friends. Be ever faithful to every member of it. Make every individual of them feel that he is recognized as belonging *here*, with you; and that you value this relation and never forget it.

And ah, the church itself! Have I not sometimes heard thoughtless persons speak slightingly of a local church? Have I not heard them speak of its minister in terms as though he were standing in no special nearness to them, and clothed with no especial sacredness by reason of his work and his aim? Surely, some of the accents of such expressions have floated into newspapers, and sometimes seem to drift upon the wind along our roads.

But this godly pastor who has come to you to-day, dear friends, if you value him according to his real meaning, the purpose and the longing which lives in every fibre of his heart, certainly stands very near to you. This purpose, I am perfectly sure, fills his soul. This longing travels out on every avenue of his being. It is recognized of you. And it is of such a nature as entitles him to your tenderest respect, to your kindest sympathy, to your continual and heartiest

co-operation. You are a great deal more than friends—you and this your pastor. He is not in some outward and official sense your leader and guide. You are one with him in his endeavor to follow, and to help all to follow, the One Lord. Very close is he to you; always pledged to prove himself your personal friend, ever true in sympathetic counsels, ever sincerely trying to convey to you all, the very light and comfort and peace of God. There are none nearer than the pastor and the people whom he serves. Be true, dear friends, to him, as you were to me, and permit yourselves the full luxury of truly loving and lovingly working with him, and serving him as he will try to serve you.

And do not fail to remember that it is impossible for him to do his best work with and for you unless you are all living in this one atmosphere of love and endeavor. The aspect of your faces, the tone of your voices in the prayer-meeting, little things which you will do or will not do, will greatly help or greatly hinder him, as he seeks to lead you along the blessed paths of the prayer meeting thoughts and worship. And do you not know that you can yourselves determine what sermons you shall hear? In an important sense, you can dictate the sermons that shall be preached from this pulpit. For your pastor must have you in mind when he prepares them. Cherish in your hearts the most Christian longings, be grateful for the most Christian counsels, aim to cherish the very truth of Christ and his tenderness in your desires and your prayers, abide in his fellowship as you sit in these seats, so as instinctively to speak in the same spirit as you go hence, to your pastor and to one another, and you will be sure to help him say the same things which Christ himself would be ever saying.

This church exists for one great thing,—to make the people of the town of Wilmington purely, deeply, strongly, unitedly, Christian; to bring these young people, these children, these older people, into oneness with Christ; to fill all these homes with the very spirit and power of Christ; to store the public sentiment here with elastic energy born of God; to build up here a living temple for the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. This great aim and endeavor is to occupy your thoughts, kindle your zeal, tax your energies. Here is your work. Concentrate on this. You have time only for this. Give yourselves to it; other interests may seem important; they are not your main work. This is. Keep to it.

Finally, my dear friends, let the very *peace of God* rule your minds. Once you sailed on troubled waters, and were all the time in chilling airs. Now, a Heavenly benediction seems to have been spoken, and in this installation, to have been sealed. Take the full blessing of the Heavenly peace into your hearts and hold it there. Hereafter, what temptations soever may assail, let them find you with minds *resolved* that, come what can, by the grace of God, this church, this people, abide one—"*By this, shall all men know that ye are*" *the Lord's* "*disciples, if ye have love to one another.*"